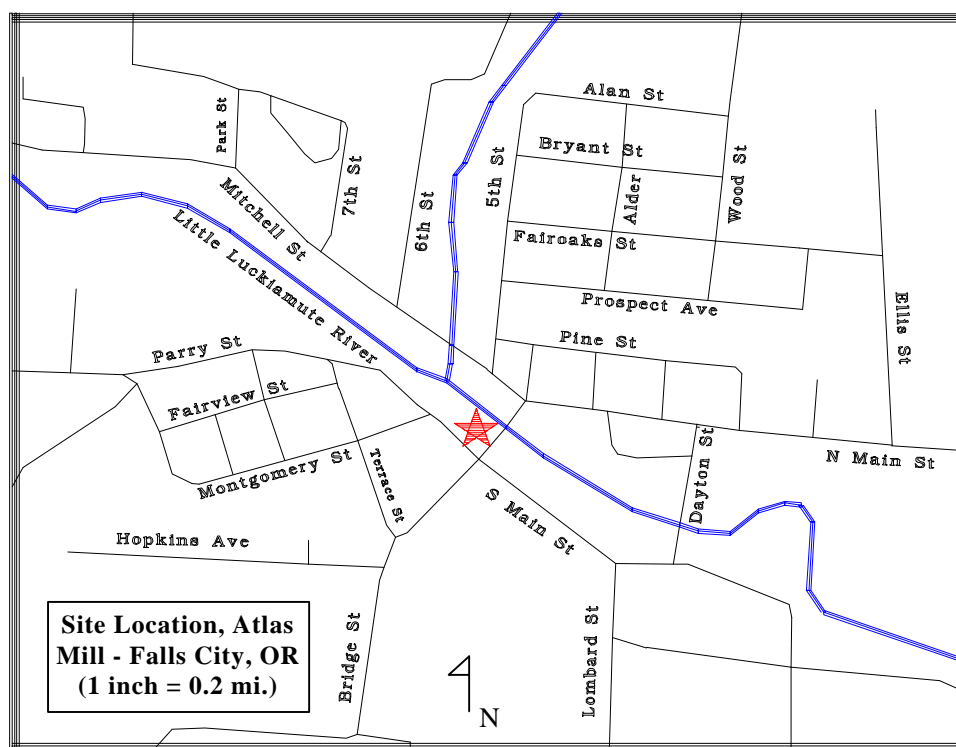


Brownfield Assessment of the Former Atlas Mill Falls City, Oregon

Project Overview

Under a Cooperative Agreement with EPA Region 10, the Site Assessment Program of the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) conducted a Brownfield Assessment at the former Atlas Mill. This site is located at the corner of Parry and Bridge Sts. in Falls City (Polk County, Oregon -- see map below). In 1997, the City of Falls City had requested assistance from DEQ and EPA in evaluating the potential for historical contamination at this long-abandoned lumber mill. DEQ completed its assessment in April 1998 at no cost to the city, and concluded that the low levels of soil contamination present at the site will not threaten human health or the environment if the city implements its plans to convert the property into a municipal park.

The site comprises 2 acres and is adjacent to the Little Luckiamute River. Various lumber mills operated at the site between the 1890s and 1964, the most recent being the Atlas Mill, from 1943 to 1964. While sawmill equipment was being salvaged in 1965, a fire broke out that consumed the facility. Since 1965, the site has been used for truck parking and annual household solid waste collection events. The City of Falls City owns the property and wanted to convert it into a park, but had been concerned that past industrial operations may have contaminated site soils.



DEQ completed the Atlas Mill assessment during the second year of a Brownfield Pilot Project funded by EPA. The purpose of the pilot is to determine the demand for, and potential effectiveness of, an expanded Brownfield evaluation program and to assist local redevelopment efforts. (Brownfield sites are usually defined as vacant or under-utilized commercial/industrial properties with known or perceived contamination that has affected these sites' sale or redevelopment.)

What We Did

The project began with a scoping meeting in June 1997, attended by representatives of the City of Falls City, DEQ, the Oregon Economic Development Department, and EPA Region 10. In October 1997, DEQ visited the site and collected soil samples, using a backhoe to dig pits in areas where past mill operations were most likely to have caused contamination. From these pits, DEQ collected 18 surface and subsurface soil samples (from depths of 6 inches to 5 feet), and sent them to EPA's laboratory for analysis. EPA's lab tested the samples for polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), metals, solvents, pesticides, and polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs).

What We Found

Because of the site's history, DEQ's primary concern was carcinogenic PAHs. However, none of the 18 samples contained any of these compounds above levels of concern. Some samples contained the metals arsenic and beryllium above screening values, but DEQ determined that these levels represented naturally occurring background concentrations, and were not indicative of past releases. No solvents, PCBs, or pesticides were found above screening levels. Based on this data, DEQ concluded that converting the site into a park would not endanger human health or the environment.

The Next Step

The City of Falls City plans to use this land for a municipal park. DEQ endorses this plan, but recommends further sampling should the property change from a park to residential or other use, especially if this change in use involved soil excavation or grading activities.

For more information or for a copy of the Brownfield Assessment report, please contact:

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